

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-25 IO-13 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

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AMEMBASSY BERN

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 3798

DEPT PASS ABU DHABI, BAGHDAD, CAIRO

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, XF, TS

SUBJECT: BOURGUIBA'S MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE: STATUS
AND PROSPECTS

REF: TUNIS 3155

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1. SUMMARY: WE BELIEVE THAT BOURGUIBA'S MIDDLE EAST INITIATIVE, WHILE NOT YET DEAD LETTER, WILL BE LEFT DORMANT FOR AWHILE UNTIL DUST SETTLES SOMEWHAT. IN GOT EYES, INITIATIVE HAS ALREADY PRODUCED TWO MAJOR ACHIEVEMENTS: (A) IT HAS INCREASED POSSIBILITIES OF DIRECT ISRAELI-ARAB DIALOGUE AND (B) IT HAS FOCUSED ATTENTION ON QUESTION OF PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM AS HEART OF MIDDLE EAST PROBLEM. AS WE READ TUNISIANS, THEY PROBABLY BELIEVE INITIATIVE HAS ADDED SOME LEAVENING TO THE DOUGH. THEY NOW PREPARED WAIT AND SEE HOW MUCH FERMENTATION TAKES PALCE -- IN OTHER ARAB CAPITALS, AMONG FEDAYEEN, AND WITHIN ISRAEL. END SUMMARY.

2. GOT HAS NOW FORMALLY DENIED REPORTS OF SECRET TUNISIAN-ISRAELI CONTACTS. STATEMENT PUBLISHED IN OFFICIAL L'ACTION JUNE 29, ATTRIBUTED TO QTE CIRCLES CLOSE TO FOREIGN MINISTRY UNQTE READS AS FOLLOWS QTE NO MEETING BETWEEN TUNISIANS AND ISRAELIS HAS TAKEN PLACE. NONE IS ENVISAGED AS LONG AS ITS GOAL IS NOT DEFINED. THAT CERTAIN FRIENDLY COUNTRIES ARE SEEKING TO WORK IN FAVOR OF SUCH MEETINGS, THAT IS TRUE. BUT NO MEETING CAN BE ENVISAGED AS LONG AS ISRAEL HAS NOT DECLARED PREVIOUSLY THAT THE 1947 UN PARTITION PLAN CGK CONSTITUTE A BASIS FOR DIALOGUE. ALL COUNTRIES FRIENDLY TO TUNISIA KNOW THE TUNISIAN POSITION, INCLUDING THE COUNTRY THAT ISRAEL REPORTEDLY SELECTED TO CONTACT THE TUNISIANS AND TO PROPOSE A MEETING. UNQTE.

3. I WAS NOT ABLE TO SEE FONMIN MASMOUDI BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FOR GENEVA ON JUNE 28. WE DRAW CONCLUSION THAT MASMOUDI HAD NOTHING NEW OR IMPORTANT TO TELL US AT THIS TIME REGARDING BOURGUIBA'S INITIATIVE. MASMOUDI DID SPEAK BRIEFLY TO AMERICAN JOURNALISTS; HE TOLD THEM HE PRESENTLY READY TO MEET WITH ISRAELIS, OR SET UP MEETING AT OTHER LEVELS, BUT ONLY ON BASIS BOURGUIBA'S QTE PLATFORM UNQTE OF WHICH ISRAELIS ALREADY AWARE. MASMOUDI ALSO TOLD JOURNALISTS HE HAD PASSED THIS MESSAGE TO ISRAELIS THROUGH SWISS (NOT ITALIANS).

4. COMMENT: LOS ANGELES TIMES CORRESPONDENT HAS ALREADY REPORTED MASMOUDI CLAIMS THAT SWISS ARE INVOLVED. THIS POSSIBLE SINCE AFTER ALL BOURGUIBA STILL IN SWITZERLAND. CONFIDENTIAL

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WE NOTE ALSO THAT MASMOUDI MET WITH ITALIAN AMBASSADOR JUNE 27, BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE)

5. WE DO NOT EXPECT FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS ON TUNISIAN SIDE FOR AWHILE. GOT UNDOUBTEDLY PLEASED AT FAVORABLE REACTIONS TO INITIATIVE SO FAR, ESPECIALLY IN WESTERN EUROPE AND U. S. AND ALSO AT RELATIVELY MUTED REACTIONS FROM ARAB STATES. INITIATIVE, IN THEIR EYES, HAS HAD

TWO IMPORTANT CONSEQUENCES ALREADY. (A) BOURGUIBA HAS OPENLY RAISED POSSIBILITY OF DIRECT ARAB-ISRAELI DIALOGUE, HENCE EVENTUAL DIRECT ARAB-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS. IT WILL HENCEFORTH BE POSSIBLE TO SPEAK MORE OPENLY OF THIS; (B) INITIATIVE HAS ALSO FOCUSED ATTENTION OF PALESTINIAN PROBLEM, IN TERMS THAT TUNISIANS HAVE CONTINUALLY DEFINED PROBLEM: THAT IS, LEGITIMACY OF PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM.

6. IT IS OF COURSE POSSIBLE TO REGARD SHIF FROM SC RESOLUTION 242 TO 1947 UN RESOLUTION ON PARTITION AS QTE STEP BACKWARD UNQTE. ISRAELIES OBVIOUSLY CLAIM THAT IT IS. BUT AS WE READ TUNISIAN THINKING, THEY DO NOT SEE IT THIS WAY. GOT ACCEPTED RES 242, BUT TUNISIANS HAVE ALWAYS SAID IT DID NOT GET TO HEART OF MIDDLE EAST PROBLEM IN THAT IT IGNORED PALESTINIANS. TUNISIANS NOW BELIEVE THAT INSURMOUNTABLE

BARRIER MAY HAVE BEEN REACHED ON PRESENT TRACK, SINCE ISRAEL SIMPLY REFUSES TO WITHDRAW TO PRE-1967 BORDERS OR EVEN CLOSE TO THEM. THUS, IN GOT (AND OTHER ARAB) EYES, ISRAEL DOES NOT ACCEPT RES. 242. TUNISIANS THEREFORE THINK IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO RETRACE STEPS AND TRY ANOTHER TRACK, RATHER THAN POUND AGAINST STONE WALL.

7. TRACK GOT PROPOSES IS FORMATION OF PALESTINIAN STATE AS MEANS BRINGING PALESTINIANS INTO POLITICAL PROCESS OF QTE DYNAMIC FOR PEACE UNQTE. THEY ARE CONVINCED THAT THERE ARE MODERATES AMONG FEDAYEEN WHO COULD BE PERSUADED ACCEPT THIS TRACK AS POLITICALLY ATTAINABLE GOAL, FORSAKING QTE IMPOSSIBLE MIRACLE UNQTE (BOURGUIBA'S TERM) OF ELIMINATION OR EVEN TRANSFORMATION OF ISRAELI STATE. AS WE HAVE REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, BORUGUIBA ALSO BELIEVES THAT SENTIMENT IS GROWING WITHIN ISRAEL FAVORABLE TO RECOGNITION OF LEGITIMACY OF PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM. TUNISIANS, THEREFORE, CONFIDENTIAL

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WOULD NOT BE IMMEDIATELY DISCOURAGED EITHER BY FEDAYEEN REJECTION OF PALESTINIAN STATE (BEIRUT 7667 FOR EXAMPLE) OR GENERAL DAYAN'S MOST RECENT STATEMENT THAT QTE THERE IS NO LONGER ANY POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING A PALESTINIAN STATE UNQTE. RATHER, THEY BELIEVE IDEA IS DYNAMIC ONE WHICH WILL BECOME STEADILY MORE, RATHER THAN LESS, ACCEPTABLE TO ALL. BOURGUIBA'S INITIATIVE, THEN, IS REALLY DIRECTED AT QTE MODERATE'S UNQTE IN BOTH CAMPS. FINALLY, TUNISIANS BELIEVE THAT BY ATTACKING PALESTINIAN PROBLEM DIRECTLY -- LETTING PALESTINIAN DEVIL OUT OF BOTTLE, AS ISRAELI PRESS PUTS IT -- IT MAY BECOME EASIER TO SOLVE OTHER (IN TUNISIAN EYES, LESSER) MIDDLE EAST ISSUES, SUCH AS ISRAELI-EGYPTIAN TERRITORIAL QUESTION. WITH PALESTINIAN FACTOR MINIMIZED, SUCH OTHER ISSUES COULD BE MORE EASILY RESOLVED BY COMPROMISE.

RELPH

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEES.

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